

**Minutes of a meeting of the World Heritage Commission Steering Committee, November 30, 2015 3pm, 82 Touro Street**

**Attending: Ruth Taylor Ken Yellis, Jo Yellis, Paul McGreevy, Pieter Roos, Tom Goddard, Morgan Grefe, Naomi Neville, Mohamad Farzan, Karen Jessup**

**At a meeting of the Steering Committee of the World Heritage Commission, the group came to consensus about how to best conclude its activities in support of an application to the National Parks Service for a place on the tentative list for Newport and Providence. In addition, the Steering Committee made some decisions about exploring a broader role for the Commission in promoting greater knowledge of Rhode Island's history on a global stage.**

**Currently, we have provided to the Parks Service the information they requested to evaluate the potential of a World Heritage Site for Newport and Providence. However, in conversation with NPS staff and others, we know that the following are will be issues for our application as it is considered:**

- Problems remain in evaluating serial nominations and preparing their applications for UNESCO, including, but not limited to, the need to create a shared management plan that preserves the properties themselves and their contexts in the communities.**

- Concerns will be raised about any applicant's capacity to create the full package for UNESCO, including the ability to raise, potentially, the several hundred thousand dollars needed to do the work.
- The Parks Service will want to ensure that we are able to make a credible case that there are direct, tangible links between the properties that we chose and the central idea of our application.
- Finally, there is an issue about the credibility of our claims for Rhode Island's history. In spite of a thorough, fact-based analysis of our claim to be earlier, more complete, and influential in the development of religious tolerance and separation of church and state in the Atlantic world, skepticism remains. This is true in part because it diverges from the dominant narrative of American history, and in part because others – Philadelphia, Boston, and Charleston – are making similar claims.

In response to the facts on the ground, the following courses of action were suggested:

- 1) That we prepare a progress report for the Parks Service that indicates the following:
  - a. The intellectual framework that we will use, including heritage theory, architectural, cultural and historical disciplines, to outline the direct and tangible links between the properties chosen and our

**central idea.**

**b. Demonstration of statewide support and potential capacity for the larger effort through letters of support from elected officials at the local, state and national level, major property owners, and other community leaders.**

**c. An assessment of how we would proceed to create a shared management plan for the serial properties nominated, including models (Blackstone Valley National Park, Frank Lloyd Wright WH nomination) and an outlined approach.**

**d. Letters from validators in academia and from notable public historians (David McCullough, for example) who can offer support for the central tenets of our application.**

**2) That we then do our best to follow the process, which is not currently set up to be transparent, and hope to hear something from the Parks Service in the spring about our status.**

**3) Finally, that we approach the Governor and her staff on two issues:**

**a. To try to integrate the developing narrative of Rhode Island's history and historical resources that the technical committee has been developing into current efforts to rebrand and market our State.**

**b. To explore, with the Governor, the possibility of reenergizing and recommissioning the Newport World Heritage Commission as a Governor's Commission on the Advancement of Rhode Island's History, with World Heritage as a signature, but not sole, effort.**